

Bethany Bible Church; AM Bible Study; April 18, 2018
The Holy Spirit—Our Helper; Lesson 24; His Gifting

THE SPIRIT'S 'SPEAKING' GIFTS

Theme: The Holy Spirit provides for the church through the ministry of 'speaking' gifts.

In our last lesson on the subject of the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit gives the church, we introduced the “equipping gifts”. Those are the gifts that are specifically identified as 'gifted persons' who provide for the equipping of the others in the church, so that they may do the work of the ministry. We drew this from Ephesians 4:11-12; where it says concerning our Lord,

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ ... (Ephesians 4:11-12).¹

We defined these as 'equipping gifts'; and we divided them into two categories: 'foundational gifts' (which are non-repeating gifts that set the foundation for the church; specifically, apostles and prophets), and 'maintenance gifts' (which are gifts repeatedly provided for the ongoing maintenance of the church; specifically evangelists and pastors/teachers). We established that, according to the Holy Spirit’s wise design, the other gifts that He gives to His church cannot function as they should without these foundational gifts in place.

And now, for the next two lessons, we’ll consider the “serving gifts” that these “foundational gifts” support.²

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You might remember that, in our last time together, we drew some important information about the spiritual gifts from 1 Peter 4:11. That verse says,

If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen (1 Peter 4:11).

And on the basis of that verse, we concluded that these serving gifts can also be broken down further into two categories—neither of which is more important than the other; but both of which are necessary for each other’s fullness in the church. In our next lesson, we’ll consider the second of these two categories; that is “ministering” gifts. But this week, we’ll consider the first category, that is, “speaking” gifts.

We refer to this first category as “speaking” gifts because of Peter’s instruction in the above verse: “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.” These gifts are primarily focused on communication rather than on hands-on service; and for that reason, they tend to be primarily “up-front” kinds of gifts. They meet the instructional and exhortational needs of the gathered assembly. Remember that these are not merely ‘talents’ and ‘natural abilities’ (which, though the Spirit may use such things, are not the same thing as “spiritual gifts”). These are

special, divinely-granted enablements that are bestowed on certain believers, as the Holy Spirit chooses, for the purpose of empowering those individual believers to fulfill their unique ‘speaking’ ministries to others in the church family.

The ones that the Bible specifically mentions are:

1. PROPHECY.

This is the ability to proclaim a specific message from God to the people of God with authority and power, and in such a way as to result in the people being admonished, or exhorted, or encouraged. (This is something that seems to be distinct from “prophets”, which is the Spirit’s gift of persons who were foundational to the church; see Ephesians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 12:28.) Paul wrote,

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith ...” (Romans 12:6).

Paul lists this gift in cooperation with other "speaking" gifts (1 Corinthians 12:10) as a gift that is clear and distinct in its utterance; and that offers a message that is clearly discerned as being from God (1 Corinthians 14:1-3, 6). This particular gift has often been associated in the history of the church (particularly with the Reformed church) with the idea of biblical preaching in the sense that it is the act of ‘speaking forth’ a revealed message from God (see 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, and possibly 1 Timothy 4:14). It may also include the public reading of Scripture, which is the verbal ‘forth-speaking’ of a revelation from God. But it can also be seen as describing those remarkable cases in the history of the church in which—in the absence of a clear written word from God—a special spoken revelation is granted to meet a specific need (see Acts 13:1-3).

2. TEACHING.

This is the ability to study, explain and apply truths from God’s word in such a way that the people of God clearly learn—in a logical and applicational way—what it is that they are to believe and do. Paul distinguished this gift from prophecy or from ministering in Romans 12:6-7 when he wrote;

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching ... (Romans 12:6-7).

It is a gift that is to have a position of priority in the church (see 1 Corinthians 12:28; where it is listed third after apostles and prophets as gifts God had appointed in His church). This, no doubt, is because of the way it brings a clarity of God’s message to His people (14:6) so that they will know how to minister through the other gifts.

3. EXHORTATION.

This is the ability to challenge and motivate believers to respond to God’s call on their lives, and to put into practical action the specific things He instructs them and desires them to do. A warning is in order: Not everyone who loves to ‘exhort’ others actually have the spiritual gift or the calling from God to do so! We’ve all seen people who took this role upon themselves

apart from God's call, and who caused a good deal of division and hurt feelings in a church. It's something, however, that is a legitimate gift; and one that, when faithfully performed, is well received and applied by the others in the Body.

We can know when this gift has been used because it results in other believers being built up and self-consciously encouraged in their work of ministry (rather than in their being torn down and discouraged). Paul commanded that this gift be exercised faithfully by those who possess it (Romans 12:8). It appears to be in close association with—and a natural outflow of—the gift of prophecy; because Acts 15:32 tells us, “Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.”

4. WISDOM.

This is the ability to know how to recommend and apply spiritual truth to a particular situation in the best way, so that the result that God desires is achieved. It's a gift that is to be considered distinct from—but in close association with—the gift of knowledge. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:8,

for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:8).

This gift, if rightly used, would obviously be exercised in full submission to the written word of God—and never as an alternative to or substitute for careful submission to Scripture. As Paul wrote in Colossians 3:16,

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Colossians 3:16).

5. KNOWLEDGE.

This is the ability to discover, understand, and systematize pertinent spiritual truth or information that the body of Christ needs in a particular situation (1 Corinthians 12:8). Paul wrote,

But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?” (1 Corinthians 14:6).

Such spiritual knowledge, in the Book of Proverbs, seems to often be vitally connected to a reverent fear of God that is put into action; as it says in Proverbs 1:7,

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7).

It would seem that this spiritual gift—because it is an endowment from the Spirit—is something distinct from merely human ‘common sense’ or insight. But it is a gift that, when properly exercised, would no doubt be in perfect harmony with what we might call ‘sanctified common sense’ and biblically sound reason.

6. DISCERNMENT.

This is the ability to distinguish and clearly identify the spirit of truth from the spirit of error; and to thus alert the church to error and protect the church family from spiritual harm (1 Corinthians 12:10). This gift seems to be reflected in what the apostle John wrote,

These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him (1 John 2:26-27).

John wrote of himself and the other apostles and said;

We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:6).

7. TONGUES.

This is the ability to receive and express an authoritative and spiritual message in a language (particularly one that the speaker has never learned) for the edification of all (1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; 14:1-5; see also Acts 2:4-11). The proper use of this gift is always associated with the gift of the interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:10; 14:5, 13, 27-28); always in an orderly manner (1 Corinthians 14:27, 32-33), and ultimately always with the goal of being clearly understood by the body of Christ (vv. 5, 7-19). The church is to be carefully balanced in the use of this gift. It is not to inordinately seek it or prioritize it over the clear message of ‘prophecy’; but neither is the proper exercise of this gift to be forbidden. As Paul instructed;

Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:39-40).

8. INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES.

This is the ability to translate a message that was publicly uttered through the gift of tongues, so that the body of Christ can understand and discern the message, and become edified by it (1 Corinthians 12:10, 30; 14:5, 13, 26-28).

¹All Scripture readings are taken from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*; copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

²Much of the material for this study was adapted from “Your Giftedness to The Body: A Biblical Study of The Nature, Purpose, and Use of Spiritual Gifts” from Bethany Bible Church, 2005.